

NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH DISCIPLINE

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CONSTRUCTIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:19-20).

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 20,21).

"And he gave some, apostles, and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. And grieve not the holy Spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:11-15, 22-24, 30).

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

The fundamental meaning of the word discipline is "to disciple." Discipline is a very vital part in leading believers into a life of discipleship. We have multitudes of those who have been saved but have never let Jesus become Lord of their lives. They are not really disciples of the Lord Jesus; self instead of the Lord has control in their lives. God never intended that His church should be a nursery, convalescent ward, rest home, delicatessen, "powder room," or house of entertainment. He purposed that it should be an armory where His soldiers are trained and disciplined for the battle. The Christian life is a constant warfare. Too many are POW, AWOL, or on furlough in the Lord's army.

To believe the New Testament is to believe in the saved being disciplined and trained for the Lord's service. And in subscribing to our church covenant (which is simply the Bible teaching on the matter in the form of a vow or promise), we have promised to do that which would discipline

and train us for His glory. Let us note the following sections of the covenant:

"We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian love: to strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness, and comfort; to promote its prosperity and spirituality; to sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines; to contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations.

"We also engage to maintain family and secret devotion; to religiously educate our children; to seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances; to walk circumspectly in the world; to be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment; to avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger; to abstain from the same of, and use of, intoxicating drinks as a beverage; and to be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour.

"We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Saviour to secure it without delay."

"Go ye therefore, and teach all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost: Teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you: and, lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world. Amen" (Matthew 28:19-20).

The Lord Jesus, as the great Commander-in-Chief, gave these marching orders to His soldiers, before His return to the right hand of the Father. He calls, invites, and commands every believer to be a witness; He calls some to do the special work of being preachers and missionaries. Therefore, this great commission is for every person who is a child of God. The "Go ye therefore, and teach all nations" could also be stated, "As ye go therefore, teach all nations," or "As ye are therefore going, teach all nations." The emphasis is that we are to teach all nations while we are going, and all of us believers are always going somewhere. When we win folk to Christ we are then, according to these instructions, to baptize them "in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost." In the book of Acts we are told that the early Christians baptized in the Name of Jesus. This does not really contradict what we have just said, even though some have become confused over it. When the Word says in Acts that the Christians were baptized in the Name of Jesus it means the authority of Jesus, and that brings us right back to the great commission. After we lead folk to Christ and baptize them; then, we are to teach them all things whatsoever our Saviour has commanded. That is, we are to teach them the whole counsel of God. Ours is a day when men prefer a scanty diet from the Word, but the Saviour has commanded that we give the complete diet. And such a procedure is constructive church discipline.

This program, as set forth by our Lord, has never been modified or repealed. The first six centuries of the present era were characterized by

great missionary zeal, when, at times, whole nations were brought to at least an outward profession of faith in Christ. But the next thousand years which Rome calls "the age of faith," but which instructed Christians rightly designate "the dark ages," were marked in great measure by an eclipse of true Gospel activity. With the coming of the Protestant Reformation came a new interest in missions, in which the Moravians were the pioneers. Later, within the last century and a half, there has followed a great awakening as to the responsibility of the church to evangelize at home and abroad. Today, there is no excuse either for lack of information or lack of zeal as to missionary activity. Some there are who deny that we of the church age are to act at all on this commission as given here, insisting that it was intended for a Jewish testimony in the coming era of the great tribulation. This is fanciful in the extreme. Far more important than any quibbling as to the exact character of this great commission is the truth of our responsibility to carry the story of redeeming love to all men everywhere.

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

Having been born again by the Word, we are called upon to walk in obedience to the faith as revealed in the Holy Scriptures; not simply hearing what is there written, but making that Word the man of our counsel. To do otherwise is but to be self-deceived, imagining that an intellectual acquaintance with the truths of the bible is all that is required.

It is easier to deceive yourself than to deceive other people. You may think you have fooled somebody else, when you have only pulled the wool over your own eyes. Many a pastor has found this out. He goes by the home or place of business and reminds his members of the church services. But on Sunday or Wednesday they are being missed. They begin to scratch their heads for an excuse and finally scratch up a lie. They do not deceive the pastor; they delude themselves. Or people may be present at church and take great satisfaction that they attend regularly. But it is not merely how often you are there, but what you do about the Word when it is preached. The story is told of a man whose watch was wrong, or he had the wrong kind of time. He arrived at the church just as the congregation had been dismissed and was pouring out of the house. In amazement, he asked, "Is the sermon done?" A Scotsman coming out replied, "Na, na, it's nae done; it has just been preached. We are going home to do it now." He had the right idea of the purpose of preaching. It is not a matter of hearing God's Word for enjoyment or to feel good

because we feel so badly about our being reproved but that we might be doers of what He has commanded.

"But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, Keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 20, 21).

The saint of God needs to daily build himself up in his most holy faith. It is the revealed will of the Lord that is so called here. That faith has been once for all revealed. On it the believer rests. Assured that it forms a foundation impregnable to every attack by men or demons, he is now to build up himself upon it. This implies continual feeding upon the Word, that the soul may be nourished and the spirit edified. But linked up with this we have prayer in the Holy Spirit: not perfunctory saying of prayers, but spiritual communion with God, bringing to Him every need and every difficulty, assured that He waits in grace to meet the one and to dissolve the other. Praying in the Holy Spirit can only result from walking in the Spirit. For if there be not self judgment, prayer will be selfish. But when Christ is before the soul, and the heart is finding its delight in Him, the Holy Spirit will Himself indite those petitions that God delights to grant.

A definite command follows: "Keep yourselves in the love of God." Mark, it is not, "Keep God loving you!" Such a thought is opposed to that glorious revelation of Him Whose nature is love. The cross has told to the full all He is; daily the believer is given to prove this loving kindness. Nor does the apostle exhort us to keep loving God. The divine nature in every believer rises up in love to Him Whose grace has saved him. But here we are told to keep ourselves in the love of God. It is as though I say to my son, "Keep in the sunshine." The sun shines whether we enjoy it or not, and so God's love abides unchanging. But we need to keep in the conscious enjoyment of it. Let nothing make the tried soul doubt that love. Circumstances cannot alter it. Difficulties cannot strain it, nor can our own failures. The soul needs to rely upon it, and there be borne in triumph above the conflict and the discouraging episodes incident to the life of faith. Then we have a fourth exhortation, carrying our hearts on to the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. We are told to await His mercy unto eternal life. We have eternal life now, by faith in Him Who is Himself the life eternal. But we are going on to the scene where life shall reign, where everything will be suited to the life we have already communicated by the Spirit. This is the end of the way; so, the trusting soul looks up in hope and waits in patience for the return of the Lord.

"And he gave some, apostles; and some, prophets; and some, evangelists; and some, pastors and teachers; For the perfecting of the saints, for the work of the ministry, for the edifying of the

body of Christ: Till we all come in the unity of the faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a perfect man, unto the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ: That we henceforth be no more children, tossed to and fro, and carried about with every wind of doctrine, by the sleight of men, and cunning craftiness, whereby they lie in wait to deceive; But speaking the truth in love, may grow up into him in all things, which is the head, even Christ: That ye put off concerning the former conversation the old man, which is corrupt according to the deceitful lusts; And be renewed in the spirit of your mind; And that ye put on the new man, which after God is created in righteousness and true holiness. And grieve not the holy spirit of God, whereby ye are sealed unto the day of redemption" (Ephesians 4:11-15, 22-24, 30).

There are certain gifted men whom God has given to the church. "He Himself gave," and no other. He gave some apostles. There are no apostles today; they were in New Testament days only. The word "prophets" refers to those who "foretold" and "forth told." After the New Testament was complete, there were no more prophets; preachers today are not prophets. But they do have the gift of prophesying, telling forth the Word of God. The evangelists in the New Testament were traveling missionaries both at home and in foreign lands. The words "pastors" and "teachers" refer to the same individual. It is a reference to teaching shepherds. These men are given "for the perfecting of the saints." They are to specialize in equipping all the saints for "the work of the ministry," that is, for ministering work, in short, Christian service. This is in order that the Body of Christ, the Church, might be built up, by additions to its membership in lost souls being saved, and by the building up of individual saints. And then the whole idea will be this -- "the measure of the stature, that brings with it the full possession on one side of that which Christ has to impart -- the embodiment in us, the members, of the graces and qualities which are in Him the Head." He also purposes in this work to save us from the false doctrines and false teachers. This is a day in which so many of the various "isms, cisms, and spasms" would lead every child of god from the truth as it is in Christ Jesus. The Holy Spirit while referring to the old nature of the believer as the "old man" and the new nature of the believer as the "new man" exhorts us to leave the former manner of daily living for that which is new in Christ. This is constructive church discipline that is so very essential.

Saved folk are those who have been regenerated by the Holy Spirit. He Who regenerated us, lives in our hearts. We are exhorted here not to grieve Him, and in 1 Thessalonians 5:19, we are exhorted not to quench Him. Christians grieve the Holy Spirit in doing what He forbids. Drinking intoxicants, smoking, lying, cheating, gossiping, slandering, committing adultery, etc., are examples of grieving the Holy Spirit. Christians quench the Holy Spirit in refusing to testify, tithe, read the Word, Pray, witness, visit, attend church, etc.

"And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers" (Acts 2:42).

There was positive action in the lives of these New Testament saints. They went on continuously in the apostles' doctrine. A doctrine is a body of teaching on any given Bible subject. We live in a day when there is such gross ignorance on such Bible doctrines as: Heaven, Hell, Sin, Satan, Christ, The Holy Spirit, Regeneration, Inspiration, Separation, etc., that it is appalling. The members of the church in the early days emphasized fellowship, the Lord's Supper, and prayer. All of these are too often lacking, but they are indeed vital to the saints.

CARE IN RECEIVING MEMBERS

A very important measure in constructive church discipline is that of exercising care in receiving members into the church. The devil could tuck his horns behind his ears, walk down the aisle of the average church, ask for membership, and be received without one dissenting vote. In Acts 2:47 the Word reads "... And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved." This could also be read, "And the Lord added to them daily such as were being saved." One who cannot honestly say that he (or she) has accepted Christ and been born again has no more business being a church member than a rattlesnake has being in a baby nursery. Every church should have a church membership committee, before which those who seek membership in the church are permitted to tell about being saved, and also, where they are made acquainted with the privileges and responsibilities that will be theirs in becoming a member of a local church of our Lord Jesus Christ. An extended course of training for young Christians should also be given after they are baptized and received into the membership of the church. To bring the person seeking membership in one of the local churches of our Lord Jesus Christ face to face with what church membership really means is for his good, the good of the church, and the glory of the Saviour. Many churches receive members, never telling them that they have a covenant. With too many of our day, church membership has degenerated into a trivial ceremony that has absolutely no place of value or lasting interest in their lives. Folk by the hundreds and thousands join the church yet never support it with their testimony, time, money, talents, presence, influence, labor, or prayers. Therefore, the purpose of constructive church discipline is to so change this sad state of affairs that being a church member will really have a vital meaning. Too many people have a relationship with some lodge, club, or society that is more vital than their church

relationship. This will cease when we make church membership a matter of importance according to the teachings of our Lord.

ENLISTMENT OF MEMBERS IN ACTIVE SERVICE

Dr. William Russell Owen is accredited with the statement that of all the present day church members,

5% do not exist,
10% cannot be found,
20% never pray
25% never attend the services,
30% never read the Bible,
40% never give,
50% never attend Sunday night services,
60% never give to missions,
75% never accept any responsible position,
85% never go to prayer meeting,
90% never practice family worship, and
95% never win a soul to Christ

This brings us face to face with abominable sin which so often is never taken into account. We live in an age when sins of commission are often emphasized, but too often sins of omission have become respectable. Our sins of neglect of, indifference to, and no concern for the things which He wants us to perform, are just as ugly to Christ as sins which we commit in doing that which is prohibited. Some folk are doctrinally sound, but they are also sound asleep spiritually. Some others are so self righteous about the things they do not do that they never get around to doing anything for the Lord.

All the members of our church should be enlisted to pray, to win the lost, to give of their money, time, talents and influence to Him, to be loyal to the church and to attend and have a part in Bible studies, worship services, evangelistic serviced, the Lord's Supper, prayer meetings, visitation program, conferences, and all the special efforts of the church and her organizations. And the doing of these very things is a part of constructive church discipline. The teaching and preaching ministry of the church is another very definite part of constructive church discipline.

In this chapter, I have referred to the need of local churches having church membership committees. The West Side Baptist Church, Natchez, Mississippi, where I am serving as pastor, has had such a committee

since 1943. I shall devote the next chapter to the work of this committee by simply giving you the material which the committee gives to all new members when they meet it, upon their applying for membership.

TEACHING NEW TESTAMENT CHURCH POLITY

It is very important that the saints be well acquainted with New Testament church polity in these days of grave departure from true Bible policies. God's people need to be taught the mode of baptism, who is eligible for baptism, what is alien baptism, that baptism is a church ordinance, who can baptize, and what is the purpose of baptism. So many facts concerning the observance of the Lord's Supper are obscure and grossly misunderstood; e.g.,

1. To observe the Lord's Supper Scripturally is called closed communion.
2. There is a specific reason why unleavened bread and grape juice are the elements used.
3. The Lord's Supper is a memorial and a prophecy.
4. The Lord's Supper is a church ordinance.
5. There are three prerequisites before the observance of the Lord's Supper.
6. The Bible never specifies the time to observe the Lord's Supper nor how often.
7. The Lord's Supper has so saving power.

God's people need to know the three ways to join a church and the three ways to cease to be a church member. The purpose and plan of ordinations is important. Believers need to understand that a New Testament Church is a theocracy -- that is, a government by the immediate dictation of God; hence, government by priests, ministers, and kings as representatives of God. And in the New Testament every believer is a priest, minister, and king unto God. No church is Scripturally at liberty to do what she pleases, but she is at liberty to do anything which the Holy Spirit leads her to do. The Bible method of financing God's work should be clearly understood by the church people. And the teaching of these and all other church policies another part of constructive church discipline.

TEACHING BIBLE DOCTRINE

Ignorance of the Bible and the substituting of man's ideas for God's teachings are very prevalent today. It is the privilege and duty of the church to teach her members what the Bible teaches about God, Christ,

The Holy Spirit, Sin, Salvation, The Virgin Birth, The Inspired Scriptures, Sanctification, Adoption, The Lord's Day, The Resurrections, The Judgments, The Blood Atonement, Hell, Heaven, Death, Separation, Church Discipline, Soul Winning, The Church Ordinances, Church Government, Prayer, Divine Healing, Talking in Tongues, Eternal Security, The Second Coming, etc.

God expects and commands His children to learn these all important matters. He expects and commands His church ever, always, and eternally to be found teaching and preaching the Word. Fairy tales, human philosophy, pseudoscience, and current events do not bring salvation for the lost and instruction for Christians. It comes through the Word of God. And as we teach Bible doctrine, we are practicing constructive church discipline.

CONCLUSIONS

1. There is a false impression that church discipline merely means placing folk outside the church fellowship
2. Discipline is woven into the very warp and woof of New Testament teaching for the churches.
3. To reject church discipline is to display our ignorance of both its meaning and the teachings of the Bible.
4. Constructive church discipline is only one form of church discipline.
5. Many churches of our day are becoming lax and indifferent in the matter of constructive church discipline.
6. Ignorance of Bible doctrine and church polity is symptomatic of indifferent, lazy believers, or of shallow preaching and teaching, or both.
7. Liberal theology leads folk to doubt the Bible teaching on church discipline as well as other great truths. Neo-orthodoxy and neo-evangelicalism are the same traitors, as liberalism, in different coats.
8. At this point in time, though doubtless there are saved folk in the movement, the Charismatics serve as a catalyst to bring strange groups into the modern day ecumenical movement, and it is the option of this author that the charismatic movement is the adhesive and cohesive that

will seal the modern day ecumenical movement into the world church of the Book of the Revelation.

PERSONAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of Father is not in Him. For all that is in the world, the lusts of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever. But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in Him" (1 John 2:15–17, 20, 27).

"Know ye not that which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any mean, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:24–27).

"For if we would judge ourselves, we should not be judged" (1 Corinthians 11:31).

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the Fatherless and windows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

"Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:12–14).

"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11).

In this study we are dealing with a phase of church discipline that is most sadly neglected. Some parts of constructive church discipline are practiced by all of our churches, but it is a very small group of individuals in any church who sincerely do much about personal church discipline. If more personal church discipline were practiced, there would be less need for punitive church discipline.

What do we mean by personal church discipline? It is the practice of individual church members in disciplining themselves. How else can we grow in the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ? How else can we live the victorious Christian life? How else will we have a separated church membership? How else can we hope to be trained to be good soldiers who endure hardness for our Lord Jesus Christ?

Our imperfections, our sins, our failures (or whatever other name you may prefer to call them) are numerous. What shall we do about them? Certainly, God wants us to repent of our sins and confess them to the Saviour for forgiveness. But what do many do? They excuse their sins by saying that they cannot be perfect, and then seem to set up a planned program of sinning instead of seeking victory over all sin. He wants to lead every one of His saints through a rigid program of discipline and training. I am referring to a purely personal matter that is a must for every Christian who really follows the Saviour. It is the only way to be a true disciple.

In our church covenant, let us note the following things which involve personal discipline and training:

- (1) "We engage, therefore, by the aid of the Holy Spirit to walk together in Christian Love;
- (2) To strive for the advancement of this church in knowledge, holiness and comfort;
- (3) To promote its prosperity and spirituality;
- (4) To sustain its worship, ordinances, discipline, and doctrines;
- (5) To contribute cheerfully and regularly to the support of the ministry, the expenses of the church, the relief of the poor, and the spread of the Gospel through all nations

- (6) We engage to maintain family and secret devotion;
- (7) To religiously educate our children;
- (8) To seek the salvation of our kindred and acquaintances;
- (9) To walk circumspectly in the world;
- (10) To be just in our dealings, faithful in our engagements, and exemplary in our deportment;
- (11) To avoid all tattling, backbiting, and excessive anger;
- (12) To abstain from the sale of, and use of, intoxicating drinks as a beverage;
- (13) To be zealous in our efforts to advance the kingdom of our Saviour;
- (14) To remember each other in prayer;
- (15) To aid one another in sickness and distress;
- (16) To cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech;
- (17) To be slow to take offense, but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Saviour to secure it without delay.
- (18) We moreover engage that when we remove from this place we will, as soon as possible unite with some other church where we can carry out the spirit of this covenant and the principles of God's Word."

"And be not drunk with wine, wherein is excess; but be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians 5:18).

The Holy Spirit here commands the saint not to get drunk or become intoxicated with wine. The word "excess" as it is generally used expresses the idea of an abandoned, debauched, profligate life. Then on the positive side, God's children are commanded to be filled with the Spirit. The word "filled" means to fill up, to cause to abound, to furnish or supply liberally, to flood, to diffuse throughout. Certainly there is no thought of the Holy Spirit being a kind of fluid to fill some kind of container. It is the idea of His having complete control. The grammatical

construction is such that "be filled with Spirit" could be rendered "be constantly being filled with the Spirit."

"Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world, the lust of the flesh, and the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life, is not of the Father, but is of the world. And the world passeth away, and the lust thereof: but he that doeth the will of God abideth forever" (1 John 2:15-17).

The word "world" is used in at least three different ways in the New Testament. It is used referring to the hills, valleys, lakes, oceans, rivers, skies, flowers, grass, trees, etc. The Saviour loved the world in this sense, and there is no command anywhere that we are not to do the same. In fact, after we are saved, we love it even more. The following words of the poet illustrate what I mean:

"Heaven above is softer blue,
Earth around is sweeter green!
Something lives in ev'ry hue
Christless eyes have never seen:
Birds with gladder songs o'erflow,
Flow'rs with deeper beauties shine,
Since I know, as now I know,
I am His, and He is mine!"

Then the word "world" is used referring to lost sinners. "For God so loved the world..." He so loved the lost that He gave Christ. We are exhorted, invited, and commanded to do the same as Christians. In fact, our failure to love the "world" in this sense is one of the major sins among Christians today. In the third place, the word "world" is used to refer to the world system man has built in which he seeks to get happiness and peace apart from God. It is seen in the business, social, educational, cultural, and religious areas of human life. And it is this "world" which John has in mind as he commands us to love it not! This passage also deals with the three channels through which come all man's enticements to sin.

- (1) the lust of the flesh
- (2) the lust of the eyes
- (3) the pride of life

It was through these three channels that the Saviour was tested in the wilderness. It is one of these three through which we are always tested,

but in contrast to Him, we turn the tests into temptations and are enticed and sin. And all three, the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life are of this world system. It all passes away and instead of bringing happiness and peace it brings just the opposite. But in obedience to His will there is lasting joy; there is endless gladness. In this light, who would not say,

"Take the world, but give me Jesus,
All earth's joys are but in name,
But His love abideth ever
Through eternal years the same."

There are many who have trusted Jesus as their Saviour from judgment, who have never learned to know Him as the rejected One with Whom they are called to walk in hallowed fellowship separated from the world.

"But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things, But the anointing which ye have received of him abideth in you, and Ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him" (1 John 2:20, 27).

In thinking of the anointing of the Holy Spirit, our minds immediately go back to the Old Testament practice of anointing the priests and kings with oil. The oil was a symbol of the Holy Spirit. As those who are saved, we are priests and kings unto God, and we are privileged to have the anointing of the Holy Spirit.

The anointing of the Spirit, like the fulness of the Spirit, is an experience that we, as His saints, are to go on having over and over again. It is not a once for all matter like the baptism with the Holy Spirit.

Here in these verses in the first epistle of John, we read, "ye know all things" and "the same anointing teacheth you of all things;" these expressions can be better understood if one knows that they may also be rendered: "ye all know things" and "the same anointing teacheth all of you things." John is not saying that we shall not study books and go to school to be taught by human teachers. But he is saying that there are some things we are not taught from books and human teachers but by the Holy Spirit alone. It comes through the anointing of the Holy Spirit. Sometimes we find lazy folk who do not want to discipline themselves to study saying that the Holy Spirit will teach them (God will fill their mouths to speak), and they fill their own mouths and heads with hot air -- God has

nothing to do with it. In this connection, I believe the following quotation is appropriate: "God can use an ignoramus, but He can only use what the ignoramus knows!"

"Know ye not that they which run in a race run all, but one receiveth the prize? So run, that ye may obtain. And every man that striveth for the mastery is temperate in all things. Now they do it to obtain a corruptible crown; but we an incorruptible. I therefore so run, not as uncertainly; so fight I, not as one that beateth the air: But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be castaway" (1 Corinthians 9:24-27).

There are two lines of truth running parallel through the Word of God: salvation which is by grace alone, and reward for devoted service. Salvation is not a reward for anything that you or I may do, nor is Heaven a reward for a life of faithfulness here on earth. Salvation is a free gift; eternal life is a free gift. Heaven is the eternal home of all the redeemed, open to every one who puts his or her trust in the Lord Jesus Christ. We cannot pay for a place in Heaven; we cannot earn it by tears, by sacrifices, by our gifts, or by anything which we can do. But while salvation, eternal life, and a place in Heaven are all set before us as God's free gifts to believing sinners, the Word has a great deal to say about the importance of service and about awards for faithfulness. "Behold, I come quickly," says our blessed Lord, "and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be" (Revelation 22:12). Certainly, the reward is not a place with Himself in Heaven, but it is the special expression of His satisfaction in the believer because of devotedness, because of faithfulness in this life. This subject and its importance is what is being brought out in the passage that is before us.

He speaks of the race; the Holy Spirit gives us a striking illustration of rewards for the Christian by referring to the reward in winning the race. It was a law that to contend in the games one must prove that he was of pure Greek parentage. We are heavenly citizens; we are not born Christians But are born-again Christians. Only those who are born again are permitted in the ace of which Paul speaks. We are running a race for reward for Christian service, Christian responsibility, and if we run our race well, there is a reward at the end. If we fail in the race, we fail in the reward. We do not fail of Heaven, or salvation, because our work is not all it ought to be or all we would like it to be. "If any man's work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire" (1 Corinthians 3:15). In 2 Timothy 2:5, we read, "If any man also strive for masteries, yet is he not crowned, except he strive lawfully."

Another way to say it is: "If a man contend in the games yet is he not crowned if he hath not observed the rules." The athlete must discipline himself and follow the rules of training, and so must we if we are to win rewards. Paul says that he is not fighting as one who beats the air; in other words, it is no sham battle. To show how important it really is, he then says, "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be castaway." What does he mean? Does he have a haunting fear that he may be lost after being saved? No! Keep in mind that he is speaking of reward for service and saying, "I want to serve that I can have the Lord's approval in that day. I must not be self indulgent. I must not let my physical passions master me, but I must master them and keep under my body." The word "castaway" means "disapproved." Have you not known of those who ran well for years and then little by little began to let down? They were not as prayerful as they used to be; they did not give time to study of the Bible as they did in the early days. They gave freer rein to natural appetites; they thought more of their own pleasure and of taking their ease. Then one day it became apparent that there had been a terrible breakdown. They had become castaways (disapproved).

"For if we would judge ourselves, We should not be judged" (1 Corinthians 11:31).

God's Word teaches that we are not to judge others' motives (Matthew 7:1) but that we are to judge their work and actions (Matthew 5:20; 1 Corinthians 5:12-13). This passage is emphasizing how we need to severely judge ourselves as to motives and actions. When we do so and make the necessary corrections, we are exercising personal church discipline. Oh, that we as God's people would be careful to judge ourselves!

"Pure religion and undefiled before God and the Father is this, To visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction, and to keep himself unspotted from the world" (James 1:27).

Here is one of the first and finest ways to put into practice what we have learned from the Word. It is a pure spiritual service because it is unmixed and unmarred by selfishness, by hope of returns. It is "undefiled before God," a service upon which God looks with joy and finds nothing to mar it. And to keep one's self unspotted from the world is to live so that earthly sordidness does not stain the life and testimony of the individual. This is one who commends the grace of god by a separated, surrendered life, one against whom no sinful practice of the world can be believed or

sustained, a man or woman of transparent sincerity, whose life has been cleansed by the washing of His Word.

There is a sense in which succor to the poor is the highest expression of the reality of our faith in Christ! The poor cannot pay. If our giving is based upon some idea of getting in return from men, that is not Christianity. Real religion calls on the orphans and widows in their need, and does so because of the love of Christ which constrains them to "help those who are weak." My, how we Bible loving Christians need a refresher on this point! Many of our unsaved friends -- and the liberals (in theology that is) outstrip us. Oh I know that they do it all too often with the idea of meriting favor with god and stacking a sufficient pile of good works to outweigh their bad deeds and thereby get in. But I repeat -- good works such as James describes here in the Scripture should be the normal fruit of faith. And if they are not there, something is wrong.

Look again at the other expression, "and to keep himself unspotted from the world." I like James' way of saying this. You know there are some Christians who hold tenaciously to the idea that we ought to withdraw ourselves from association with sinners. Our Lord Jesus never taught that. In fact, in His high priestly prayer, He seems to ask for the opposite! "Father... I pray not that thou shouldest take them out of the world, but that thou shouldest keep them from the evil one." Monasteries and asceticism were never a part of His program; men have tried to palm these off on the uninstructed. The Saviour knew that we would have to live among men in order to live, and furthermore that we might tell them of Him! How else can it be done? Of course we understand that our being in the world does not mean our participation in its sin and unbelief -- that is what James has in mind when he calls us to keep from stains and spots. Right here is where Lot failed so miserably. When he chose the plain country of Jordan, and then pitched his tent toward Sodom, I am quite sure that he had no thought of indulging himself in Sodom's sin. But it was not long before the sin of Sodom got in Lot, and the spots appeared. They became so numerous and notorious that angels had to take Lot in hand, and deliver him by the "nape of his neck." The Apostle Peter had this scene in mind when he wrote of the deliverance of just Lot, who had been vexed with the "filthy conversation of the wicked." He did not keep himself unspotted from the world. He did not exercise personal discipline!

"Teaching us that, denying ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously, and godly, in this present world; Looking for that blessed hope, and the glorious appearing of the great God and our

Saviour Jesus Christ; Who gave himself for us, that he might redeem us from all iniquity, and purify unto himself a peculiar people, zealous of good works" (Titus 2:12–14).

He is saying here that a divine message has been sent from Heaven to earth, showing us that denying, or refusing, ungodliness and worldly lusts, we should live soberly, righteously and piously in this present world, "looking for that blessed hope and glorious appearing of the great God and our Saviour Jesus Christ." This last expression could be read this way, according to the judgment of many sober authorities, "He is our great God, and It is He Who became in grace our Saviour." So God's grace saves us, and He teaches us personal discipline. He trains us to be separated from sin, ungodliness, unrighteousness, and worldly lusts. These things from which He teaches us to be separate are seen in immodesty (whether wearing shorts, bathing suits, basketball suits, cheer leader uniforms or dressing so as to be identified with the liberated woman and/or unisex), drinking, gambling, dancing, movies, a lot of T.V. programs, tobacco, filthy literature, honkytonks, mixed swimming, night clubs, bars, and a lot of hellish practices in love, courtship, and marriage. It calls for personal discipline. So few practice it that there is no wonder that many churches are hotbeds of worldliness. And it is the return of the Lord which is here put before us to influence our daily lives. It is one thing to hold the doctrine of the Lord's return, but quite another to be held by that blessed hope.

"Dearly beloved, I beseech you as strangers and pilgrims, abstain from fleshly lusts, which war against the soul" (1 Peter 2:11).

God's saints are here reminded of their pilgrim character and their position in Christ which call for them to refrain from participation in that which is detrimental to them. It is a call for Christians to personal discipline.

Fullness of the Holy Spirit

In one of our Scripture (Ephesians 5:18) for this study, we see two commands:

- (1) Do not be drunk with wine.
- (2) Be filled with the Spirit.

As we teach and preach, should we not be as careful to emphasize the second of these commands as we are the first? It is surely true that some

emphasize the second more than the first, but I fear, with the majority, the first command is given a greater place than the second. Should you and I not feel just as ashamed of not being filled with the Holy Spirit as we would at being drunk with wine? This is personal church discipline to which we should give careful attention!

The Holy Spirit fills us -- that is, controls us -- when we yield unconditionally and ask Him to do so. The prevalent powerlessness and fruitlessness of most Christians today is evidence of a lack of fullness of the Holy Spirit. Have you ever been filled with the Holy Spirit? Once? Twice? Three times? He does it over and over, if we meet the conditions. The New Testament Christians were filled with the Spirit; they went out, spent themselves in witnessing, and came back to the place or prayer to be filled again. There is joy in being filled with the Holy Spirit, but He does not fill us that we may merely feel good. He fills us that we may have grace, power, and boldness to witness; read Acts 4:23-33.

Some have mistakenly thought that the filling with the Holy Spirit is some strange, ecstatic, emotional experience that comes to them at a given moment and is then gone. The man who is filled with Holy Spirit does not go off into some wild fanatical state, but works thoughtfully and carefully with God, and his testimony has power with men. If you turn to Colossians 3:16, you will find that by letting the Word of Christ dwell in you richly you get the same results as you do in Ephesians 5 by being filled with the Spirit. There is an old rule in mathematics that "things equal to the same thing are equal to one another." If to be filled with the Word is equal in result to being filled with the Spirit, then it should be clear that the "Word-controlled" Christian is the Spirit-controlled Christian. As the Word of Christ dwells in us richly, controls all our ways, as we walk in obedience to the Word, the Spirit of God fills, dominates, and controls us to the glory of our Lord Jesus Christ.

Anointing of the Holy Spirit

The anointing, like the filling of the Holy Spirit, is ours over and over again as we meet the conditions. And the conditions are the same: unconditional yieldedness and requesting Him to do it. He fills us primarily that we may have grace, power, and boldness to witness. He anoints us primarily that we may have wisdom in study, appropriation, and teaching of the Word. We know things because He lives in us and anoints us. Potentially we know all things because He does, and He indwells us. Actually, it is different because He is still teaching us!

Preachers, teachers, and other Christians can testify of experiences in reading, studying, and giving out the Word when through the Holy Spirit's anointing, they had wisdom to see and understand truth regarding certain matters which they had never before seen in the same passages. How He longs to constantly do this for all of us. God forgive so many of us for missing so many of His blessings. Would you daily seek His anointing? The problems brought on by false teachers will be averted, if we are constantly under His unction!

Overcoming Temptation and Self Control

Thank God for His promise to us regarding our temptations. "There hath no temptation taken you but such as is common to man: but God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that ye may be able to bear it" (1 Corinthians 10:13). The Christian who does not exercise personal church discipline will not be prepared to depend upon the Lord for victory, as he faces tests. In the wilderness, as Satan tested Jesus, our Lord answered his every suggestion with a quotation from the Word of God.

So, the Heavenly Father promises us victory in tests. We can have victory by the Word, but what if we have not disciplined ourselves to study it and to hide it in our hearts that we might not sin against God? Read the Word, study it, memorize it that you may be prepared to use it and be a victorious Christian. Scripture memory work is not just for boys and girls or just for men and women; it is for all of us.

Peter exhorts God's children, in his second epistle, to add the seven Christian virtues to their lives after having been saved by His matchless grace. These seven are as follows:

- (1) virtue (manly courage)
- (2) knowledge
- (3) temperance (self control)
- (4) patience
- (5) godliness (God-like-ness)
- (6) brotherly kindness
- (7) charity (love in action)

Self control is one of these seven. In Galatians 5, Paul lists temperance or self control as the fruit of the Spirit.

Bad tempers, gossip, fussing, suspicion, overeating, and many other sins prove that too many Christians have not the Christian virtue of self control. Do you? Are you willing to exercise personal church discipline that you may be victorious in tests and have self control?

Judging Ourselves and Pressing Towards the Goal

In 1 Corinthians 11:31, Paul wrote these Spirit inspired words, "For if we judge ourselves, we should not be judged." One would almost think that he said that if we excuse ourselves (instead of judge) we should not be judged. It is much easier to excuse ourselves because of our personal weaknesses; we excuse ourselves because we say that others did as bad or worse. God wants us to judge and confess our sins. What revival would come if each Christian began honestly judging himself and exercising personal church discipline.

Our Father not only wants us to judge ourselves, He also wants us to press toward the goal. What is our goal? Paul expressed it this way in Philippians 3:13-14: "Brethren, I count not myself to have apprehended: but this one thing I do, forgetting those things which are behind, and reaching forth unto those things which are before, I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus." Today people scorn high standards of morality and spirituality. They speak of churches being too legalistic and too strict. But what is our goal; He is Christ Jesus, the perfect Son of God. What gross ignorance then is it to speak of being too strict or having standards that are too high when our goal is to be like Him! Daily let us press toward the goal and that will require personal church discipline.

Simple Living and Willingness to Be Different

Men are slaves to fashions and customs. Sad to say, even God's saints get caught in this trap. If the fashions of clothes are immodest and sinful, some so fear the censure of others that they do what everybody else is doing. Some do not want to drink, smoke, dance, wear shorts, etc., but they do not want to be called a "wall flower" or "Sunday school pupil" or maybe a "religious fanatic." It is true that living godly in Christ Jesus will bring persecution. Our Lord was absolutely sinlessly perfect; well why was He so disliked, persecuted and even crucified? Among other reasons, it was because He was willing to be different and was not concerned about what others thought or said about Him! The young man Daniel was a good example for young and old today; read chapters one and six of the book of Daniel. He was willing to be different for the glory of God,

and he did not let the opinion of others change him. Social pressures will cause us to be swallowed up in sin, if we are not fortified by disciplining ourselves in prayer, study of the Word, and constant fellowship with Him. God help us to let the Master, not public opinion, determine our practices. Some would like to have a New Testament church, but they cannot because to have one requires a willingness to be different.

Along with our willingness to be different, we need more simple living. Certainly, God does not forbid us to buy clothes, cars, houses, furniture, or even jewelry. He wants us to buy those things that are needful and can be used for his glory. But He is so often dishonored in His saints' efforts to become too luxurious. With so many millions in our world going to Hell, we would do well to spend more in getting out the Gospel and less to be used selfishly. Many Christians are looking at stolen televisions, riding in stolen cars, and living in stolen houses. What do we mean by this statement? They robbed God of tithes and offerings and then bought things for themselves with the stolen money. What a shame! And if we tithe and give offerings, there should still be a limit to our emphasis on luxury, if we will best glorify Him! Oh, for disciplined saints who would be willing to be different and to do more simple living to His honor.

Courage and Faith

God constantly tests us. That is the reason James wrote in the second verse of the first chapter of his epistle: "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations (tests)." This within itself is a disciplinary experience; He wants us to advance in courage and faith. In these days of attacks on the Bible and all that is high and holy, we need Christians of great courage and faith. When Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were called upon to fall down and worship the golden image or be cast into a burning fiery furnace, they proved themselves to be men of courage and faith. They told the heathen king that their God was able to deliver them. But they added, that if He did not choose to deliver them, they still would not dishonor Him by worshipping the image. At home, on the job, at school, on the playground, downtown, etc., we constantly face situations that call for courage and faith. Have we been so disciplined as to meet the tests?

We may live long enough to see Christians lose their lives because they are Christians. It happened in the past and may happen again. God knows we need to so live and practice personal discipline as to ever be children of great courage and faith.

Conclusions

1. Personal church discipline is grossly neglected.
2. If we had more personal church discipline, we would seldom, if ever, have to withdraw fellowship from members of our churches.
3. Personal church discipline is a great testimony to the lost because they are constantly watching the lives of the Christians.
4. Personal church discipline is only one form of church discipline.
5. Achievement in any field of honorable activity is the result of personal discipline; how much more in the Christian life!
6. God's greatest saints have been those of rigid discipline and training.
7. Personal discipline is right, honorable, and without substitute, but one who practices it sins grossly, if he becomes self-righteous about it.
8. High standards do not make one legalistic; legalism is depending on works to save you or rules to make you spiritual.
9. Separation is from sin and to Christ; separation from sin but not unto Christ leaves one self-righteous.
10. Who is a spiritual person? "A spiritual person is one who is saved, in the center of God's will, content with how God made him, (or her), with what He gave him, and where He put him, and not jealous of how He made others, what He gave them, or where He put them."
11. Some folk are self-righteous over being separated, and some are self-righteous in not being separated.
12. Meeting the standards to teach does not in itself make one spiritual, but one should have a standard high enough to be a good example before being trusted to teach.
13. Parents who do not practice personal discipline have a very bad influence on their children.

CORRECTIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE

"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23-24).

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matthew 18:15-17).

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21).

"Sufficient to such a man is the punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive any thing, I forgive also: for if I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us; for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:6–11).

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Timothy 5:20).

"A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject" (Titus 3:10).

We must ever keep before us the fact that we have church discipline in order to correct that which is wrong. It is to restore the member who has failed; yes, we purpose to get them back in fellowship with God and the church. This is all involved in training a believer to be a disciple of Christ, which is the fundamental purpose of discipline.

Some know so little about church discipline, as taught in the New Testament, until they think that it is carried on in order to get rid of church members, be harsh, embarrass folk, and operate a church gestapo. Would it not be wonderful if they could see how that discipline is to correct, restore, and thus build up the child of God in the faith and help him to let the world see Christ in his life? Withdrawing fellowship from people is not the purpose of church discipline; it is what we do only when we are unable to correct and restore.

In practicing the following paragraph of our Church Covenant, we help carry on corrective church discipline: "We further engage to watch over one another in brotherly love; to remember one another in prayer; to aid one another in sickness and distress; to cultivate Christian sympathy in feeling and Christian courtesy in speech; to be slow to take offense but always ready for reconciliation and mindful of the rules of our Saviour to secure it without delay."

"Therefore if thou bring thy gift to the altar, and there rememberest that thy brother hath ought against thee; Leave there thy gift before the altar, and go thy way; first be reconciled to thy brother, and then come and offer thy gift" (Matthew 5:23–24).

Here our Lord makes it clear that when there is trouble between brethren, it should be corrected before there is even an effort to worship. We are to go to the member. Correction is to be made. What hypocrisy, what mockery that some folk sit in church pretending to worship our Lord when there are folk sitting there in the same service to whom they will not so much as speak. To be right with God is to be right with others.

Gossip, hard feelings, jealousy, malice, and hatred must be removed, if our worship is to be acceptable to Christ. The power of the Holy Spirit is never manifested in some services because there are some things that first need to be corrected. These verses tell us emphatically that we are to get the matters straightened out, then come worship.

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: But if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican" (Matthew 18:15–17).

In the passage in Matthew 5:23–24, we hear the Lord saying that wrongs between brethren should be corrected before these brethren worship. However, we must remember that though some may make every Scriptural effort to correct the wrongs, there are still some who are unwilling. Here the Lord instructs us what to do when we go to right wrongs, even though the member to whom we go will not be reconciled. We are to take two or three brethren with us and try again. If this effort fails, we are to take the matter to the church. And if that fails, fellowship is to be withdrawn from the offending member.

Let us note with emphasis the effort that our Lord teaches us to make in order to correct the wrong and have restoration made. The major objective is to help those who have been overcome with sin. It is not to hurt but to help. This responsibility rests on every believer. It is not merely a discipline committee's job but the job of all of us as brothers in Christ. And it is right because our Lord taught it!

"Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good" (Romans 12:21). This verse could be read: "Stop being overcome by evil, but be overcoming the evil by means of good." this is in keeping with the context, showing us how to correct trouble which we have with our enemies. Enemies to Christ and His church may be found in the local church membership as well as outside. In speaking of heaping coals of fire on his head, He has reference to the burning shame and remorse which the man feels whose hostility is repaid by love. This is the only kind of vengeance the Christian is at liberty to contemplate. In thinking of this privilege and responsibility of the believer, we join the poet in saying:

"There is a service God-inspired,
A zeal that tireless grows,
Where self is crucified with Christ,
And joy unceasing flows.
There is a being 'right with God'
That yields to His commands
Unswerving, true fidelity,
A loyalty that stands."

"Sufficient to such a man is this punishment, which was inflicted of many. So that contrariwise ye ought rather to forgive him, and comfort him, lest perhaps such a one should be swallowed up with overmuch sorrow. Wherefore I beseech you that ye would confirm your love toward him. For to this end also did I write, that I might know the proof of you, whether ye be obedient in all things. To whom ye forgive any thing. I forgave anything, to whom I forgave it, for your sakes forgave I it in the person of Christ; Lest Satan should get an advantage of us: for we are not ignorant of his devices" (2 Corinthians 2:6-11).

To get the import of this passage, we must go back to 1 Corinthians 5. Terrible fornication was being countenanced in the church at Corinth. A man had taken his father's wife. Evidently the man's mother died, and his father married again. The, the son took his father's wife for his own. Under the leadership of the Holy Spirit, Paul sternly rebuked the church for its laxity in not exercising discipline, and he closed the fifth chapter with these words: "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person."

The church took the rebuke and did something about it. They withdrew fellowship from the brother. But when he repented and sought restoration to fellowship with the Lord and the church, the local congregation refused to restore him. Now is that not just like Satan? First,

he succeeded in getting the church to tolerate evil and not exercise church discipline. Then, when Paul was used of the Holy Spirit to get them to practice discipline, Satan stepped in and led them to undue severity. They hounded the man until he was about to be overwhelmed and in despair. And in these verses of 2 Corinthians 2, Paul is showing them that correction and restoration is the very point of discipline. That is the purpose of it!

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

With all the evil effects and havoc which the heresy of the Judaizers had produced in the churches in the regions of Galatia, there were some members who needed to be disciplined. These Judaizers had tried (and succeeded in some cases) to lead the members to believe that salvation was not by grace alone but grace plus works. They put special emphasis on the ceremony of circumcision. Paul's entire letter here was purposed to correct this heresy. And in this verse he makes it emphatically clear that the discipline is to be exercised with a view to the restoration of the sinning member. He points out that it is to be done in humility and love with the realization that the one trying to help the offending member could have fallen himself. Surely, this method will remove all self-righteousness in exercising corrective church discipline.

If we realize what we ourselves are and how easily we too might fall, we will not be overly stern in dealing with others. It is not that we are called upon to excuse sin. We are to point the way of deliverance. We must consider our constant need of divine help, in order that we may be kept from sin and know better how to deal with those who miss their path in the hour of testing.

"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Timothy 5:20).

This verse could be read: "Those who are sinning, in the presence of all be rebuking, in order that the rest may have fear." The context shows that the primary reference is to church members. The word "rebuke" means to reprove another with such effectual wielding of the victorious arms of the truth, as to bring him, if not always to confession, at least to a conviction of his sin.

This admonition is simple, easy to be understood, and refreshing in these days when there is so much spineless preaching and teaching. So many are afraid they will offend the people, and overlook the fact that they hurt Christ, when they refuse to obey the plain teachings of the New Testament.

Look at what the word says in 2 Timothy 3:16–17. "All scripture is given by the inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works." Among other things, it makes it clear that God gives His Word for correction. And then climaxes it all by saying that the man of god should be mature, thoroughly furnished unto all good works. What a pity that we have so many preachers, deacons, teachers, and church members in general who are more interested in pleasing people than in pleasing the Saviour.

"A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject" (Titus 3:10).

Here we see that there should be efforts to admonish those who have accepted heresy before fellowship is withdrawn. Heresy is the teaching of any doctrine that is contrary to the Scriptures! In other words, we seek to correct the false teachings that are being countenanced. How pertinent this admonition is in these days when folk are so careless about joining churches, for trivial reasons of a thousand varieties, without consideration of heresy or heresies they may be teaching.

How we need some correcting in our churches, all over the country, on this matter of the doctrines that are being taught.

We Are Our Brother's Keeper

From the early pages of the Word of God, we learn that we are our brother's keeper. God constantly affirms this throughout the Holy Scriptures. Our neglecting it, denying it, or hating it cannot change it. It is a wonderful privilege, as well as a terrible responsibility. Cain is an example of how horrible it is not to remember that one is his brother's keeper.

In practicing this truth, we practice corrective church discipline. And certainly the words "brother" and "keeper" in Christian language would suggest that love should prompt corrective church discipline and that restoration is the motive.

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Not to practice corrective church discipline is to sin against our brother. Until we have sought sincerely to help him correct sin in his life, we could not claim to be his keeper. We became guilty of his sin in the eyes of God, when we refuse to help our church brother.

Genuine Love Seeks to Correct

Look again at what God's Holy Spirit tells us about love (charity) here in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8,13. "Charity (love) suffereth long, and is kind; charity (love) envieth not; charity (love) vaunteth not itself, is not puffed up, Doth not behave itself unseemly, seeketh not her own, is not easily provoked, thinketh no evil; Rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; Beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things. Charity (love) never faileth: but whether there be prophecies, they shall fail; whether there be tongues, they shall cease; whether there be knowledge, it shall vanish away... And now abideth faith, hope, charity (love), these three; but the greatest of these is charity (love)."

The story is told of a deacon who heard of a young brother in the church who was planning to take dancing lessons. Instead of gossiping about the boy, as too many do today, he went to see him. He told the boy what he had heard. Then he said, "Son, you know we are brothers in Christ in this church and you know dancing leads to sin that ought never to be in the lives of God's children. I just wanted to come to talk and to pray with you about it." They prayed together. Then, the young man said: "I had planned to begin dancing, but, Brother, since talking to you and praying with you, dancing is all off for me." Praise God for a deacon who loved his brother. Love will do its best to correct.

We have some today who say that they love their children so much that they cannot correct them and discipline them. This is not love; this is sentimental foolishness. If they really loved their children, they would correct and discipline them. The same applies to church families as well.

Correction Will Often Produce Prevention -- Making Rescuing Unnecessary

As long as preachers, deacons, teachers, and other church leaders do not hesitate to correct and point out the wrong, we will have the prevention of sin in many, many cases. Some churches try to help folk in trouble, but do not have the courage to stand publicly and without apology against the sins causing the trouble.

The old proverb: "An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure" well deserves our heed. Yet how disgusting it is to find churches and church leaders more concerned about their popularity with a godless world and a bunch of religious hypocrites than they are about doing the will of God and really seeking to keep people out of sin and faithfully warning against all sin.

How sad that millions of people go to church every week but never are taught about sin involved in dancing, movies, tobacco, petting, mixed swimming, drinking, gambling, wearing shorts, profanity, desecrating the Lord's Day, abortion, using dope, living together without marriage, etc. Corrective preaching and teaching would make a lot of rescuing unnecessary.

Wrong Is Bad; Refusing to Correct the Wrong Is Worse

There is, and will continue to be, sin found in the church among God's people. This is bad, but it is far worse when we refuse to correct the wrong. No matter how thoroughly we teach, sin is still going to have to be dealt with in church discipline. But as we have seen trying to show throughout this lesson, we have the discipline program to correct and restore. And, if we did not have the discipline, that within itself would be an injustice to our brethren.

We could prevent so many from falling into sin, if we were faithful in our churches. But, nevertheless, sin will come in, and we will have to go to our brothers and sisters and deal with them in corrective church discipline, if we are to be New Testament Christians and have a New Testament church.

We are not to do it because it is easy; it is not easy. We are not to do it because it is popular; it is not popular. We are to do it because we want to obey Him and because we love Him and our fellow Christians.

Conclusions

1. Corrective church discipline is one of several kinds of church discipline.
2. Some of God's best blessings and some of the most precious experiences He gives are forfeited those who refuse to have corrective church discipline.
3. The whole program of church discipline is to correct and restore.

4. Too many church leaders are more concerned about pleasing people than they are about pleasing God.
5. To love is to correct.
6. Only the ignorant and the dishonest deny that the Bible teaches us to practice church discipline
7. Some preachers cry out against the liberal theologian who cuts out part of the Bible and then turn around and cut out the message of church discipline.
8. An ounce of correction is worth a pound of restoration.

PUNITIVE CHURCH DISCIPLINE

"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife. And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you. For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed. In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth. I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of this world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one so not to eat. For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person" (1 Corinthians 5:1–13).

"And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:17,18).

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Romans 16:17).

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

"A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is such is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself" (Titus 3:10–11).

"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars" (Revelation 2:2).

"Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure" (1 Timothy 5:22).

Punitive church discipline means discipline with a penalty. In other studies we have talked about Constructive, Personal, and Corrective church discipline. Never would there be need for punitive church discipline, if God's people taught and practiced the constructive, personal, and corrective. But since God knew that some would not, He taught us the practice of punitive church discipline.

The whole purpose of church discipline is to train, develop, to disciple, to correct, to strengthen, and to build up. Yet, as a last resort, it is sometimes necessary to exercise punitive church discipline and withdraw fellowship from a member. In other words, we do not have church discipline to get rid of members, but sometimes, this becomes necessary when members refuse to do anything about their sins.

"It is reported commonly that there is fornication among you, and such fornication as is not so much as named among the Gentiles, that one should have his father's wife" (1 Corinthians 5:1).

The city of Corinth was a cultural and intellectual center. It had a population of approximately 650,000. The goddess Aphrodite, the goddess of sexual lust, was worshipped in this city. In celebrating the rites of Aphrodite, the goddess of carnal love, the Corinthians gave themselves up to the most shameful licentiousness. It was so notorious that in all parts of Greek-speaking world, if men or women were found

behaving in an unclean way, the worst that anybody could say of them was that they acted like Corinthians. Here we see that the sins, the shameful practices of the lost world, had crept into the church at Corinth. A man had taken his father's wife (his own stepmother) to be his wife. Paul, guided by the Holy Spirit, referred to this as such fornication "as is not so much as named among the Gentiles." The words fornication and adultery are used synonymously and interchangeably in the New Testament. For unmarried people to engage in sex relations is to commit the sin of adultery or fornication. For married people to have sex relations other than with their own companions or to get a divorce and remarry (without Scriptural grounds) is to commit the sin of fornication or adultery. The only Scriptural grounds for divorce and remarriage is adultery or fornication, and then only the innocent has permission to remarry.

"And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you" (1 Corinthians 5:2).

Instead of the church seeking to rescue the sinning members or to remove them from membership (if they would not be rescued), she was puffed up in pride. They were proud of their liberal mindedness. It sounds like some of the bragging we hear in present day churches. Many have become too liberal minded to believe, preach, or practice the truths of a verbally inspired Bible. This church was proud of her accomplishments and did not hesitate to say so, while her Lord was grieved over gross sin that was being countenanced. Is it not true even until now? Some brag about being too liberal to have church discipline. Is it something about which to brag or over which to weep? Some churches brag about offerings, additions, large buildings, fine programs, wonderful denominations while their memberships include drunkards, liquor store operators, adulterers, adulteresses, gamblers, thieves, harlots, whoremongers, etc.

"For I verily, as absent in body, but present in spirit, have judged already, as though I were present, concerning him that hath so done this deed, In the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, when ye are gathered together, and my spirit, with the power of our Lord Jesus Christ, To deliver such an one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, that the spirit may be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus" (1 Corinthians 5:3-5).

Under the compulsion of the Holy Spirit, Paul speaks boldly about his conclusions regarding this shameful adultery. He is urging them to

withdraw fellowship from the sinning brother. He clearly indicates that the brother has possibly committed the sin unto death and that God will kill him. A Christian cannot lose his salvation, but he can definitely sin so as to cause God to cut off the rest of his physical life. Look at these words in 1 John 5:16–17, "If any man see his brother sin a sin which not unto death, he shall ask, and he shall give him life for them that sin not unto death. There is a sin unto death: I do not say that he shall pray for it. All unrighteousness in sin: and there is a sin not unto death." And again, listen to these words from 1 Corinthians 11:26–30 "For as often as ye eat this bread, and drink this cup, ye do shew the Lord's death till he come. Wherefore whosoever shall eat this bread, and drink this cup of the Lord, unworthily, shall be guilty of the body and blood of the Lord. But let a man examine himself, and so let him eat of that bread, and drink of that cup. For he that eateth and drinketh unworthily, eateth and drinketh damnation to himself, not discerning the Lord's body. for this cause many are weak and sickly among you, and many sleep."

"Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:6–8).

Once again, Paul condemns the glorying on the part of this church which should have been mourning over sins within the congregation. He reminds them that a little leaven will leaven the whole lump. To overlook gross sin that should be dealt with in the life of a church member is to make the whole congregation guilty before God. All sins are against God, and there are no little sins and big sins in His sight. Although, some sins affect society worse than others. Leaven is always used as a symbol of evil in the Scriptures. Here it is a symbol of wicked sex immorality. The church is urged to remove the leaven (the sinning brother) that they may be unleavened (free from the leaven of sexual immorality). And the church is challenged to do it because of Christ's sacrifice for us. To refuse to have church discipline is to dishonor the death of Christ for His church. God's church is to observe the Lord's Supper with unleavened bread and unfermented grape juice (because leavened bread and wine are both leavened substances that would make them symbolic of evil). And the leaven of immorality is to be purged from the church family that His supper may be observed with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth.

"I wrote unto you in an epistle not to company with fornicators: Yet not altogether with the fornicators of the world, or with the covetous, or extortioners, or with idolaters; for then must ye needs go out of the world. But now I have written unto you not to keep company, if any man that is called a brother be a fornicator, or covetous, or an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard, or an extortioner; with such an one no not to eat" (1 Corinthians 5:9–11).

Here the church is reminded of former commands to separation from fornicators, covetous folk, extortioners, and idolaters. Yes, it is made clear this does not mean we have to avoid all contact with such people in the world, and if it did, we would have to go out of the world to do it. "If any man that is called a brother" (a church member in other words) is a fornicator, covetous, an extortioner, an idolater, or a railer, or a drunkard with such a one we are not to eat. Jesus' teachings and practices made it clear this could not mean it is wrong to eat a meal with such people. But it is wrong for a church to keep such people in her membership and for God's people to eat with such folk at the Lord's table. It is interesting to see here that a railer, an extortioner, and a covetous person are classed with fornicators, drunkards, and idolaters. Some would not dare be mixed up in sex immorality, drink strong drink, or worship idols, but they are so covetous, so grasping for money, that they cheat their fellow-men and rob God of His tithes and offerings, and that is extortion. They use profanity, tell dirty jokes, lie, and gossip, and that is a railer.

"For what have I to do to judge them also that are without? Do not ye judge them that are within? But them that are without God judgeth. Therefore put away from yourselves that wicked person" (1 Corinthians 5:12–13).

God will judge those out in the world, but He calls upon His children to do so regarding these matters in the local congregation. That is exactly what punitive church discipline is; look at this quotation, "Therefore put away from among yourselves that wicked person." Some say that the Bible tells us not to judge, and it does tell us that there are some things we are not to judge -- motives! But the same Bible tells us that the church is to judge in these matters, and that fellowship should be withdrawn from certain members.

"And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be

bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:17-18).

In verses 15 and 16 of this same chapter, we are instructed as to how to seek to restore our brother, when difficulties between brethren have become a discipline matter. These verses show how the discipline matter must be dealt with in a punitive way by the church family, if the other efforts for restoration fail. The church is to withdraw fellowship from the member, and put him out of the membership of the church. He must not have shelter of the church for impurity. He must not continue as a member of a local congregation. This is punitive church discipline! This is what our Lord meant by the expression, "let him be unto thee as an heathen man and publican." Often the member is unsaved and needs Christ. Sometimes the member is away from Christ, saved but out of fellowship with the Lord and needs to come confessing his sins. But this does not mean that we are to cease our efforts to win them.

He shows in verse 18 that when the church exercises punitive discipline it is binding in Heaven as well as in the local congregation. Some folk who have been Scripturally disciplined may sarcastically say that they do not care about ever getting right with that church again. They will only get things right with God; so, they say. But Christ makes it clear here that you can not get right with Him until you get right with the church that disciplined you.

"Now I beseech you, brethren, mark them which cause divisions and offenses contrary to the doctrine which ye have learned; and avoid them" (Romans 16:17)

Here we have a clear warning against false teachers. They are definitely to be avoided. If they should be found inside the membership, they would have to be dealt with as discipline cases. And if restoration could not be effected, this would be another clear example of how punitive church discipline would have to be exercised.

"Now we command you brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

This is another passage in God's word which makes it emphatically clear that there are times when punitive church discipline must be used. It is a command; no choice is given! We must either believe it and teach it or disobey the infallible Word of God. There were brethren in the church at Thessalonica who needed to be dealt with by the exercise of punitive church discipline. And, as we have said before, that means the

withdrawing of fellowship from a member; literally, it is taking one's membership in a local church away from him. The word "tradition" in this verse means doctrine or teaching.

"A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject; Knowing that he that is subverted, and sinneth, being condemned of himself" (Titus 3:10–11).

A heretic is one who refuses to accept true doctrine as revealed in the Bible, and prefers to choose for himself what he is to believe. Of course such action is sin: sin with which we must deal. The brother must be rejected -- that is removed from the fellowship. And such action is punitive discipline!

"I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them which are evil: and thou hast tried them which say they are apostles, and are not, and hast found them liars" (Revelation 2:2).

Our Lord Jesus commends the church at Ephesus for her works, labour, patience, and punitive church discipline. They would not countenance and fellowship evil nor accept false teachers and preachers. If churches today followed our Lord in this matter like the church at Ephesus did, a lot of these wolves in sheep's-clothing (preachers with liberal theology) would be discovered as well as members who live in gross sin.

"Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partakers of other men's sins: keep thyself pure" (1 Timothy 5:22).

The words "lay hands suddenly" have to do with restoring a sinning church member into the fellowship of the local church after punitive church discipline has been exercised. The laying of hands always signifies identification. The saint, upon forsaking his sin, is again identified with the local church. In verses 19, 20, and 21 of this same chapter, we are told about dealing with sin and exercising punitive church discipline. Then this 22nd verse deals with restoration. We are bidden to restrain by deliberate prudence the impulses of mere pity. A hasty restoration to church fellowship tempts the sinning brother who has been disciplined (in a punitive way) to suppose that his offense has not been so very serious after all, and smooths the way for a repetition of the sin. "Good natured easy men" cannot escape responsibility for the disastrous consequences of their lax administration of the law. They have a share in the sins of those they encourage to sin. That is the reason Paul said: "Neither be partaker of other men's sins." And for this very reason, the

church sometimes finds it necessary to place on probation those seeking restoration to fellowship after being disciplined (in a punitive way). If the church is negligent here, she becomes a partaker of the offender's sins. The expression "keep thyself pure" could be read, "keep thyself upright and honorable."

God Commands Us to Exercise Punitive Church Discipline

Our Heavenly Father does not say that this is one method and that there are many more, even though some of our preachers and church folk talk that way. The liberal theologian, the neo-evangelical theologian, and the neo-orthodox theologian are trying to decide what part of the Bible is inspired. The non-denominationalist and inter-denominationist are trying to decide what is important and what are the non-essentials. Some of our brethren join us in crying out that the Bible is verbally inspired, but when they come to the subject of punitive church discipline, they believe their own teaching concerning the infallible Word. God commands this form of church discipline; He leaves no choice to us, if we are to be faithful servants. We have no choice when we come to immersion as the only mode of baptism; Jesus commanded it! We have no choice but that the Lord's Supper is for the saved, baptized members of a local, New Testament Church; Jesus commanded it! And likewise we have no choice when it comes to punitive church discipline, Jesus commanded it! Some in their unfaithfulness may refuse to practice discipline, but only the ignorant or dishonest deny that God commanded it

Since God commands that we exercise punitive church discipline, He will call us to give an account of our stewardship in this matter. Surely our church families must be trained to have a Scriptural discipline program and that takes time. But it also takes time to bring our people to tithe, to be soul winners, and Bible students; therefore, we must be about the job to His glory.

Punitive Church Discipline Is A Blessing to a Church and Her Members

This statement is shocking to some because they have always erroneously thought of discipline as some terrible, hurtful practice. To exercise discipline is hard, but it is a real blessing. And, is it not true that the same is the case with discipline in our homes, schools, etc.? Yet, one shows ignorance if he tries to carry on a home or school without discipline. The same is true in our churches.

It is always a blessing to church people to have high standards -- to have much expected of them. Some who would turn the grace of God into lasciviousness always cry out against discipline and say that it is legalistic and that we are not under the law but under grace. However, punitive church discipline is really vitalistic instead of legalistic, when exercised as taught in the New Testament. And any teaching that excuses sin in the Christian life, because we are saved by grace, is sinful, devilish, and definitely unscriptural.

Again punitive church discipline is a blessing because of the testimony it gives a church. Hypocritical church members are offended by it, but even the unsaved admire the church who has Christ-like standards of living. To be a church member should mean something, but does it where there are no standards? If some churches would put just as much emphasis on church discipline -- clean living -- as they do on church suppers, they would have a mighty revival!

But should we be surprised that punitive discipline is a blessing. Our Lord taught it, and is He not the One Who knows best the needs of His local churches?

Punitive Church Discipline Helps to Lead Christians to Restoration from Sin

There are few, if any, real born again folk who will not come back for restoration to fellowship with the Lord and the church after they have had fellowship withdrawn from them as church members. Some may wait, but, if they have really been washed in the blood of Christ, it will be very difficult for them to stay away. And of course some were not saved to begin with, and no one should be surprised if they do not ask for restoration.

Not to discipline members when it is needed means to shelter them in their sin. To discipline them means to pull the mask off and help them to see that it is putrid and abominable and must not have respectability lent to it by the church. Sad to say, some people merely join the church to be counted respectable! Then, they live like the devil, but true punitive discipline will cancel these proceedings. And when genuinely saved folk get involved in discipline, they want to be dealt with like the Lord would have it done. Sometimes some object, but it is generally because of their lack of knowledge. We should not be surprised at this lack of knowledge, when many preachers do not have the courage to preach discipline much less practice it.

God has definitely shown us over and over again that only through punitive church discipline are we ever able to lead some people to confess and forsake their sins to His glory, the good of the church, and their good personally. Let those who will, deny it; that does not change the fact that it works. And it is simply a lie of Satan that says that the exercise of punitive church discipline only drives people further into sin. It may reveal a lot that we did not know, but it is only a high sounding excuse that attributes the sin to the discipline.

Probation Often Needs to Be Exercised in Restoring Members Who Have Been Disciplined in a Punitive Way

In our Scriptures for this chapter, we saw in 1 Timothy 5:22 that God warns against hasty restoration, when one had fellowship withdrawn. For the glory of Christ, the good of the church, and the good of the offender, it is often absolutely essential that there be a probationary period. This is not some hard, cold sly, or doubtful practice, as some sometimes erroneously charge. On the contrary, it is very helpful for all who are involved.

One who comes in genuine repentance never objects to probation. Some who look on their sin lightly and trivially have their pride hurt when asked to serve on probation. They are trying to get the church to lend respectability to their sin. You always sin in passing over sin lightly!

A probationary period is not always needful or advisable. Frequent offenses, ugly attitudes while being dealt with, efforts to join other churches without first clearing up discipline matters with one's own church, long waiting without repenting when being dealt with, etc., are things that practically always make a probationary period very important.

Proving one's self while on probation is always an honor and never a dishonor. Being on probation is not being policed or doubted, but it is being given an opportunity to prove one's genuineness.

Conclusion

1. There is a false impression abroad that the church should never put anybody out of her membership.
2. Punitive discipline is the last resort in church discipline.
3. To deny punitive church discipline is to deny the infallibility of the Bible.

4. The liberal theologian has the same right to deny some parts of the Bible as some so-called conservative theologian does to deny the teaching and principle of punitive church discipline.
5. In the average church today, it is simple to become a member, and no matter how you live you will still be a member.
6. Those who refuse to teach the truth about punitive church discipline are guilty of the same sin as those who substitute sprinkling for baptism.
7. One must be either ignorant or dishonest to deny that the Bible teaches punitive church discipline.
8. What a shock it would be to have the pastor and deacons recommend that fellowship be withdrawn from a member for drinking or adultery in the average Baptist Church today.

LOCAL CHURCH DISCIPLINE

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear. Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure" (1 Timothy 5:20, 22).

"A man that is an heretic after the first and second admonition reject" (Titus 3:10).

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall be loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:15-18).

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

Our church has always had some form of church discipline even from the time of her organization in 1938. But it was no more than that of the average Baptist church until 1941. All of our Baptist churches have church discipline, even though few of them call it that. We have seen this

particularly in our earlier chapters on Constructive, Personal, and Corrective Church Discipline. However, very few of our Baptist churches practice any sort of Punitive church discipline.

God has blessed marvelously in our efforts to carry out this part of the New Testament church program. Certainly, our imperfections and failures have been many, just as they have been numerous in our efforts to carry out the New Testament program of evangelism, stewardship, missions, etc. But in all of these matters God always blesses honest efforts to follow the teachings of His verbally inspired and eternally infallible Word.

Often when our program of church discipline is mentioned, some outsiders will say that they would like to know if all the members cooperate in such a program as they should. Well, of course, the answer is emphatically, "No!" But neither do they all cooperate in tithing, attending church, Bible studies, missions services, witnessing, church visitation, etc., as they should. But we would never have any New Testament program nor could we ever justify one, if we had to wait until every member of a local church (assembly) cooperated perfectly in carrying it out.

We all ought to bow our heads in shame that we have so many times neglected to do, or have done incorrectly, the things our Lord teaches His churches to do in the Bible. But, certainly, we should discard nothing that He teaches because of our failures in the past. On the contrary. We ought to repent of our sins and set out to teach and practice the whole counsel of God for His churches.

"But be ye doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving your own selves" (James 1:22).

God's Word has a reciprocal action. To hear it and not obey It is to cause It to have a bad effect in your life. Many like for preachers to preach all the Bible, but when their pastor suggests that the church family begin to practice the whole Bible, such teachings as that of punitive discipline cause violent reactions. As a result, some pastors, in haste, follow unscriptural methods. Some oppose discipline; so, the pastor seeks to have the church family vote on having a discipline program. This is bad and totally unnecessary. We should not have to vote to do what the Scriptures teach. We do not have the church family to vote to tithe, to witness, to pray, etc. We simply practice these teachings. Yet, some do not join us in the practice of them. Other pastors preach on the need of discipline and fight a "straw-man" so to speak. Thus, they give the church

family the impression that they are about to initiate a new project unknown before to local churches. Not so, discipline is not new; it is as old as the New Testament Scriptures. And it was practiced by New Testament churches from the days of their beginning.

We must start where the local churches are and seek to lead them to the practice of the entire Word of God. We do just this in other matters, e.g., soul winning, tithing, visitation, etc. In our church services, I began preaching on separation, the resurrections, the second coming, etc., soon after becoming pastor. After a year or more, folk began to say that they thought we should practice church discipline, and we began to do so. It was nearly eight years before we had a full program, but it has taken that long in some of our other programs, also.

The average church who has had little, or no, church discipline, and is as much as 10 years old, would probably require 10 to 12 years to be led to practice a full New Testament discipline program. We must not hastily move to the point of destroying that which we are trying to grow, and some have done just that.

But we must seek to preach and practice the whole counsel of God, as James 1:22 makes emphatically clear.

"Them that sin rebuke before all, that others also may fear" (1 Timothy 5:20).

Sins which bring public reproach on the Saviour are ones with which we deal in punitive discipline. One of the church family who is guilty of such sin gets the discipline charge cleared, and restoration to fellowship with the church family, by coming forward during the invitation of any of the services, stating what the discipline charge is and saying that they are asking the Lord and the church family for forgiveness. We seek to deal with this delicate kind of thing with as little embarrassment as possible for the one who comes. After all, it is humiliating enough to come asking forgiveness, publicly. But this method is spiritually healthy and Scriptural, as we see here in 1 Timothy 5:20. I explain to the congregation the reason for their coming and their desire for forgiveness. They give their approval. And praise the Lord, He is willing to forgive, and so is our church family. And, you know, it is a genuine revival experience when folk, who have discipline matters to straighten out, come like this. All of us are reminded of Galatians 6:1 "Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted." It makes us

realize our dependence upon one another, our need for each other's prayers, and it helps us to love each other more.

"Lay hands suddenly on no man, neither be partaker of other men's sins: keep thyself pure" (1 Timothy 5:22).

We are not to ordain pastors, deacons, etc., hurriedly. It must be after much deliberation and assurance of His leadership. But really, this passage is not dealing with the laying on of hands in an ordination service as some erroneously teach. The context and the text demand that it has to do with the restoration of sinning church members to fellowship, after it has become necessary for them to be disciplined. The truth of this verse is the reason we sometimes must place members on probation in certain circumstances involved in disciplinary action. I will say more about this matter later in this chapter, when I discuss our church's procedure in the exercise of probation.

"A man that is a heretic after the first and second admonition reject" (Titus 3:10).

Our church family does deal with those who hold to unscriptural doctrines. Across the country, it is not hard to find Baptist church members who do not believe the Bible to be infallible, who do not believe in eternal security, who do not believe in the virgin birth, who do not believe in a bodily resurrection, who do not believe in a literal Hell and Heaven, etc. Yet, they are in good standing in their churches. This is positively wrong. We should not have church members in our fellowship who do not believe the fundamental doctrines of the Bible. Titus 3:10 is very clear about this matter.

"Now we command you, brethren, in the name of our Lord Jesus Christ, that ye withdraw yourselves from every brother that walketh disorderly, and not after the tradition which he received of us" (2 Thessalonians 3:6).

In exercising punitive church discipline, our church family simply follows the emphatic command of this passage (along with many others) of God's Word. Since it is wrong for liberal theologians to mutilate certain passages of the Bible, it is certainly wrong for Bible believers to ignore, deny, or cut out passages teaching punitive church discipline.

"Moreover if thy brother shall trespass against thee, go and tell him his fault between thee and him alone: if he shall hear thee, thou hast gained thy brother. But if he will not hear thee, then take with thee one or two

more, that in the mouth of two or three witnesses every word may be established. And if he shall neglect to hear them, tell it unto the church: but if he neglect to hear the church, let him be unto thee as an heathen man and a publican. Verily I say unto you, Whatsoever ye shall bind on earth shall be bound in heaven: and whatsoever ye shall loose on earth shall loosed in heaven" (Matthew 18:15–18).

Our Lord not only not teaches punitive church discipline in this passage, but He gives details as to how to deal with a discipline matter involving brothers being "at odds" with each other. This same procedure is not required in all discipline cases because of the uniqueness of this particular problem. But it is very important that we do all that we possibly can, in genuine love and concern, to go to our brothers and sisters in seeking to help them have victory over sins and to be Scripturally restored to fellowship in our local church, when it has become necessary for them to be disciplined.

"Brethren, if a man be overtaken in a fault, ye which are spiritual, restore such an one in the spirit of meekness; considering thyself, lest thou also be tempted" (Galatians 6:1).

False doctrine had been introduced into the churches in the regions of Galatia. As Paul comes to this last chapter in the epistle, he emphasized the spirit in which discipline should be conducted. When a church is infiltrated with false doctrine, it is not long until punitive church discipline must be exercised. In this first verse of the sixth chapter, the Holy Spirit reminds us that punitive discipline is intended to bring the offender to repentance and restoration. And it is so important that those who are exercising it, do it in love with the view to help a brother, being conscious of the fact that were it not for the grace of God they would be the ones who would be having to be disciplined. We impress our church family with the fact that to discipline a brother with a censorious self-righteous attitude makes us as guilty of heinous sin as the one whom we are disciplining. Most churches would have to have a baptism of love before they could begin a New Testament church discipline program. I always have a serious question about any member who seems concerned that we hurry to discipline a brother. Love waits long, is patient, and does not rejoice in iniquity. We have dealt with some folk as long as three and four years before withdrawing fellowship.

Personnel and Methods Used in Executing Church Discipline

In the broadest sense of the word, the entire membership is the personnel used in carrying out of church discipline. The leaders are the ones who have the biggest responsibility. Our pastor, deacons, teachers, and all other leaders in the faithful activity of filling their offices automatically carry on the program of church discipline.

In other words, the method is through the preaching services; the teaching, training, and missionary programs; and special committee activities. When there is a need for committee work in punitive church discipline, the pastor and deacons constitute such a committee and call in others as the need arises. Our church has a church membership committee to help strengthen our programs of teaching, training, and missionary efforts.

Examples of Matters for Which Punitive Discipline Is Exercised

Our church has never attempted simply to list all matters that are, or would be, dealt with in punitive church discipline. Many are dealt with only as the occasion arises. But we do keep before us examples of sins that necessitate a penalty, realizing that from these examples it is never difficult for spiritual-minded folk to apply them to other things equally as wrong.

Examples of sins for which our church exercises punitive discipline are: using or selling marijuana, abusing or selling other drugs, drinking intoxicants, selling or dispensing intoxicants (waitresses who serve beer, in cafes, restaurants, etc., grocery boys who deliver groceries that include beer, checkers who check out beer with groceries at cash registers in super stores, and men who haul beer with or without other commodities on transfer trucks are all a part of the selling and dispensing of intoxicants, adultery, homosexuality, lesbianism, incest, lying, fighting, cursing, gambling, mixed swimming, dancing, attending Sunday movies, ball games, hunting, fishing, and other sports on Sunday, heresy, not attending church for a year, and not moving church membership after having been moved away for a year. There are exceptions to the rule in these last two matters: (1) illness, serving in the armed forces, away in school, serving on the mission field, (2) having no church in the new area with which they can conscientiously affiliate -- in this case they must notify our church and continue sending their financial support to remain in good standing.

Why Some Sins Necessitate Punitive Discipline and Some Do Not

All sins in a Christian's life should be confessed to God. Some should be confessed only to God; these are sins known only to God and His child and that do not involve others. Some sins should be confessed only to God and some other individual who is involved. Then there are some sins that need to be confessed to God, individuals involved, and publicly to the church (the local assembly).

The Bible does not teach that every time a Christian commits a sin he should be dealt with in punitive church discipline. If it did, we would all be discipline cases constantly. All sins are ugly and abominable. Surely, they all are heart-breaking to our Saviour, but some sins in the lives of saints bring public reproach upon Christ. The sin of drinking intoxicants and the sin of not faithfully reading your Bible illustrate the difference. And this is the reason why some sins are dealt with in punitive discipline and some are not.

Therefore, when folk say that the church people should not deal with any other member in discipline unless they are free from all sin, they simply display their own ignorance. But surely all who help deal with a brother overtaken in a fault should do it with all love and humility, lest they also be tempted (tested).

Plan for Dealing with Special Discipline Cases

Our pastor and deacons are the standing committee in dealing with discipline cases. However, other men and women are asked to serve when needed. The church could and would always be ready to make official additions committees, if circumstances made such a step wise.

Those who are discipline cases are visited, prayed with, read to from the Word, talked with, and implored to be willing to ask God and the church for forgiveness. This is repeated many times where any interest whatsoever is manifested; some cases are dealt with for years. Others, where no interest is shown or where the person asks not be counseled, are not dealt with as long. Sometimes, when it is impossible to locate the person, it becomes necessary to deal with him without being able to see him personally. This is one of the reasons why it is so very important for every member to keep the church informed of his address while here or even out of the State, as long as his membership is still in our church. Mere accusations are never brought before the church as charges; they must first be substantiated.

Our Pastor and deacons are far more exercised in a burning desire to help folk not have fellowship withdrawn in discipline than the average member ever knows. Some people in ignorance may speak of this work as though the pastor and deacons dealt with it carelessly, trivially, or flippantly. However, when all has been done that the committee knows to do for a person on discipline, the only choice left is to recommend that fellowship be withdrawn -- that means that the person is removed from the church membership until he repents and comes asking for forgiveness. Upon his coming, the necessary steps are taken for restoration even if it is years later, just as they would have been while dealing with the discipline case before fellowship was ever withdrawn.

Responsibility in Dealing with Discipline Cases

This is the responsibility of every individual member. When one knows of a discipline matter and does not seek to help the other one or ones involved, he becomes a party to the sin. For one member to know of another being involved in sins calling for discipline makes him responsible before God to go to the individual and try to help. If this fails, others should be called upon for help. However, when one knows of a discipline matter and feels incapable of going to try to help alone, it is certainly all right for that one to come to the pastor and deacons for help. But nobody should be gullible and start discipline charges on mere hearsay or gossip. In fact, when one comes with an accusation against any brother, he is then asked to meet with our discipline committee and then go with them to the brother, or else, to refrain from such talk. If such a person refuses to comply, he becomes a discipline case himself (read 1 Timothy 5:19 for a Scriptural illustration).

Let us not only think of the responsibility of dealing with punitive discipline cases from the standpoint of who does it, but also from the standpoint of the sacred responsibility, that this work places upon us, to God and our fellow Christians. What a sacred responsibility is ours to lost souls that they may be saved, and what a sacred responsibility is ours to our fellow Christians that they be true disciples. To discipline means to disciple. It is the same responsibility to each other as members of His local church as that of parents to teach and train their children. What a wonderful privilege -- what a terrible responsibility! We are still our brother's keeper. How sinful it is to have Christians who do not care to help fellow Christians be their maximum for Christ.

Procedures in Probation

Sometimes, it becomes necessary for our church to require a period of probation before a discipline case can be restored to full fellowship. This is taught by the Word of God. 1 Timothy 5:22 is primarily an exhortation concerning the restoration of sinning members to church fellowship. Sometimes we can sin against the Lord, the church family, and the brother who is a discipline case, if restoration is made too quickly. Experience after experience in our own local congregation has proven over and over that such a practice honors the Lord and helps our people. No person sincerely seeking restoration to fellowship with the Lord and the church would have any hesitation to serve on a period of probation, if asked to do so. But, of course, with those who have ulterior motives, it is a different matter. When one becomes incensed at being asked to serve on probation, he gives his fellow Christians good reason to doubt his sincerity.

Recommendations for one who is being disciplined to serve on probation come from the pastor, deacons, and/or the church membership committee.

General reasons for asking certain discipline cases to serve on a period of probation are as follows:

- (1) Those who are rather bitter when being dealt with as a discipline case.
- (2) Those who keep prolonging the matter of asking forgiveness.
- (3) Those who try to join another church while on discipline and later return for restoration here.
- (4) Those who are on discipline over and over again.
- (5) Those whose general behavior shows little desire to really do God's will.

Motives for Having Church Discipline

Our first motive for having church discipline is to please our Lord Jesus Christ. He has taught us to exercise church discipline for His glory and for our good. He would never lead us wrong. We would not be so presumptuous as to try to improve His plan. We believe that He expects us first to be obedient servants.

In the second place, our motive is one of love for our brethren. We do not have any right to say that we love our brethren, if we fail to do this thing that is so essential to their good. Children in their rebellion and immaturity sometimes resent the love that prompts their parents to discipline them in the home. In fact, they may sometimes doubt the love

of the parents because of it. We must expect some Christians in their immaturity and sometimes rebellious hearts to misunderstand. But it is our business to still love them, teach them the truth, and help them grow. On the other hand, any who would take an ugly attitude toward one who has been disciplined is showing the same immaturity that one who resents being disciplined shows.

Still again, another motive is not to withdraw fellowship and place one out of membership, but to help him to restoration of fellowship with God and the local assembly. The withdrawing of fellowship is only a last resort, when the other cannot be accomplished. Some would erroneously try to make folk believe that discipline purposes to get rid of folk, and they refer to it crudely as "throwing them out" or "kicking them out."

Finally, the forth motive of church discipline is to give the local assembly a better testimony before a lost world. Even the lost recognize the inconsistency of drunkenness, adultery, desecration of the Lord's Day, church membership in name only, etc., on the part of professed Christians. They often say that if that is being a Christian, they want no part of it. In having church discipline, this obstacle is removed from the lost who are honest in their criticisms. Of course, those who are not honest will criticize the church no matter what she does. But God forbid that we give grounds for criticism because of our moral and spiritual laxity.

Conclusions

1. Church discipline has been a wonderful blessing to our people.
2. Because some criticize and misunderstand church discipline does not change its value and its being Scriptural practice.
3. Some will oppose church discipline, because of human weakness and sinfulness, if their own loved ones are involved; otherwise, they will be for it.
4. To oppose church discipline or to be self-righteous in practicing it is sinful. Let us do neither!
5. Those who do not visit in our church visitation program have no right to say that the pastor and deacons ought to visit the discipline cases more often. We would if we had more help.
6. We need more individuals and churches today who are concerned about following the New Testament teaching of church discipline, regardless of what people, who desire simply to be popular, may say.
7. Church discipline is both your and my responsibility.

8. To speak favorably of our church's stand, as a member, and then not help in the discipline program is to be hypocritical.

NEGLECTED CHURCH DISCIPLINE

"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God; I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in the fire, that thou mayest be rich; and write raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see. As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent. Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and him with me. To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the Spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 3:14–22).

In our other chapters, we have looked at church discipline from several viewpoints: Constructive, Personal, Corrective, Punitive, and Local. Now in this chapter we want to consider how church discipline has and is being neglected and some of the tragic results.

Our Scripture passage gives not only the command of our Lord that we exercise church discipline, but also the trend of the churches to neglect it during the time since our Saviour returned to the right hand of the Father after His death, burial, and resurrection.

There is not much true love -- God's kind of love -- known and practiced today. There is not a lot of sentimental selfishness that is passed off as love. I might illustrate what I am talking about by referring to the pastors who "cut corners" and compromise when it comes to preaching the whole counsel of God (and that would include church discipline). They claim to love their people and cannot press for these points that reprove and rebuke. But the truth is that they so love themselves they fear the criticism which Satan would foster against them, if they were true to the teachings of our Lord, if they really loved their people, they would teach them and lead them to practice what our Lord taught. Certainly, He loves

the people and knows what is best and a necessity for all. It is never right to do wrong to make an opportunity to do right, and love -- real love -- true love -- always constrains us to do right.

The loss of respect by many unsaved people for the churches goes right back to the spineless position, sentimental selfishness, unscriptural promotion, and numbers racket that exists in some of our churches today.

"And unto the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write; these things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, the beginning of the creation of God" (Revelation 3:14).

The word "angel" means messenger or pastor. So, the letter is addressed to the pastor, and the message is for him and for his flock. It is the church at Laodicea. Laodicea means "the rights of the people" or "the rule of the people." In other words, it means "democracy." Could any other term more aptly set forth the condition of the present-day church affairs? It is the mistaken idea that the voice of the people is the voice of God; the age of anarchy is almost upon us. Someone has said that we once fought a war to save the world for democracy, but that the day will come when we will have to fight to save the world from democracy.

The Bible nowhere teaches that the New Testament Churches are democracies; it does teach that they are theocracies. Baptists have been as guilty, if not more guilty, than other groups in this matter. What is a theocracy? It is government by the immediate direction of God; yes, it is government by priests, servants, and kings as representatives of God. Who are the priests, servants, and kings in the New Testament church? Every believer is a priest, servant, and king. Therefore every individual member is under obligation to find God's will in the policies, and methods followed in His church. And then when the church votes, there will never be divisions. He will not lead two people in the same congregation two different ways on the same subject. We have no right to vote and do as we please. We do have the right to vote and do as He pleases. So, New Testament churches are theocracies operated on democratic principles. He is the one "to run" the church as He speaks through us: His priest, servants, and kings! Most churches are far more concerned now about what will please the people than they are about what He wants. It is characteristic of the church that neglects discipline as ordained by our Lord.

The remainder of the verse states that this message comes to the Laodiceans from "the Amen," "the faithful and true witness," "the

beginning of the creation of God." When our Lord is spoken of as "the Adam," It means that He is the truth. He could be the truth without uttering a word, but the expression, "the faithful and true witness" means that He is not only the truth but that He faithfully proclaims, manifests, and makes known the truth to us. What He says will be exactly true because He is in Himself absolute truth, and there is nothing beyond Him in all the realm of truth. He is the faithful and true witness of God. When He speaks there is no exaggeration and no minimizing. When It says that He is "the beginning of the creation of God," it is referring to His deity. The Lord Jesus is God, and thus He speaks to this church at Laodicea.

"I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot: I would thou wert cold or hot. So then because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will spue thee out of my mouth" (Revelation 3:15–16).

The meaning of hot is seen in Romans 12:11, where the same Greek word is used -- fervent (burning) in spirit. The word translated cold is used in Matthew 10:42, "a cup of cold water" and "as cold waters to a thirsty soul..." (Proverbs 25:25). The church at Laodicea was neither cold nor hot, but lukewarm. Some would lead us to believe the hot means the saved, the cold means the lost, and the lukewarm means the saved who are out of fellowship. Such an interpretation is not acceptable. The hot and the cold could both be applied to the saved who were doing something for Him. Some burning hot in His service -- some doing little things that will also be rewarded -- as those giving a cup of cold water in His Name. Certain things are good whether hot or cold -- tea for example -- but nothing that is lukewarm is good to the taste. This church was neither hot nor cold -- nothing was good -- it was a church filled with unsaved members. The Lord spoke of it as such a disgusting situation that He was about to spue (vomit) them out of His mouth.

"Because thou sayest, I am rich, and increased with goods, and have need of nothing; and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked: I counsel thee to buy of me gold tried in fire, that thou mayest be rich; and white raiment, that thou mayest be clothed, and that the shame of thy nakedness do not appear; and anoint thine eyes with eyesalve, that thou mayest see" (Revelation 3:17–18).

These people had no consciousness of any need. They considered themselves rich. We see the same all around us today; churches so often measure themselves by the size of their offerings, membership, and buildings. And many of them from that materialistic viewpoint have need of nothing. Jesus said that they were miserable; it means pitiable. His

heart was moved in pity toward them; He had no congratulations to offer them. When He said that they were poor, He meant that from His standpoint they were possessing nothing worth having. Then He used the word "blind" to describe them; it is the word "nearsighted" which most accurately expresses the thought -- lacking in vision, lacking light, devoid of the sense of the far distances, confined within narrow limits. Then again, He says that they are naked; yes, they were nude, stripped of the clothing of glory and beauty that ought to adorn the church as the Bride of Christ. They were lost people who needed to be clothed in the garment of His imputed righteousness.

The Lord Jesus counsels them to get "gold tried in the fire," "white raiment," and to "anoint thine eyes with eyesalve." "The gold tried in the fire" would make them rich; it is divine righteousness -- that which is imputed to helpless sinners when they receive our Lord Jesus Christ as personal Saviour. The "white raiment" would give them clothing; this is referring to practical righteousness. It is the bride's trousseau, that she may be properly clothed; yea, it is practical righteousness produced in the life of the saint by the Holy Spirit, when the individual surrenders to Him. The "eyesalve" for the eyes is the anointing of the Holy Spirit. John in the second chapter of his first epistle tells us what is ours through this anointing. Let us read verses 20 and 27, "But ye have an unction from the Holy One, and ye know all things. But the anointing which ye have received of Him abideth in you, and ye need not that any man teach you: but as the same anointing teacheth you of all things, and is truth, and is no lie, and even as it hath taught you, ye shall abide in him."

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Revelation 3:19).

Here our Lord makes it clear that these stinging words of rebuke from Him come because He loves them. He then challenges them to repent. And that is Christ's last word to the churches -- "repent." Today the way so many leaders talk you would think that His last word is "go," evangelize. But it is not! Evangelism comes as a result of revival. Revival comes when men repent. So, to get to the bottom of our troubles, we need repentance. He said "go" before His ascension. The churches were not going now; so, this time His Word is "repent."

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me" (Revelation 3:20).

Here our Lord stands outside the local church seeking entrance. Think of it -- Jesus shut out of a church which claims to be His. What a tragedy! But after all, the church which "cuts out," ignores, and refuses to practice some sections of His Word that displeases the members is shutting Christ out. We cannot refuse His Word and have Him!

"To him that overcometh will I grant to sit with me in my throne, even as I also overcame, and am set down with my Father in his throne. He that hath an ear, let him hear what the spirit saith unto the churches" (Revelation 3:21-22).

Our Lord certainly knows that many local churches as such in these last days will never open the door to Him. Yet, some are so stupid as to teach that the whole world will be converted. And when He is not even wanted in so many churches! Yet, our Lord does plead with any and every individual who will heed. He also mentions the special reward for those who do heed and who overcome.

Neglect of Church Discipline Is Rebellion against God's Authority

The fact that man is sinfully depraved makes him rebellious against authority. And the Word makes it clear that this rebellion will wax more and more evident as we approach the second coming of Christ. Today we see as never before rebellion against authority in the home, school, government, and churches. Is there any wonder so many fight against the Bible as being verbally inspired? They desire to excuse themselves from accepting the authority of the Word.

Yes, the Laodicean age is upon us. There is much talk that illustrates it: "The majority is right" -- "The people don't like it" -- "The voice of the people is the voice of God" -- "You should not preach like that; people won't like it" -- "I believe in going along with the boys" -- "Everybody does it; it must be all right."

In neglecting the Word of God and its teachings concerning church discipline, we are simply showing how we are rebelling against God's authority. We prefer our ways and will to God's Way and Will. The natural man is that way, but God expects us to be different because He saved us. He expects us to submit to His authority. Could it be that the big trouble today is the same as it was at Laodicea -- church members who need to be saved?

Neglect of Church Discipline Leads to Boasting in the Flesh

The church at Laodicea was actually boasting that she had no needs. These folk felt that they "had arrived." Churches with big buildings, offerings, and memberships often do the same and class folk as "of brand," and "fanatical" who emphasize the need of not compromising the Word, living a separated life, and walking in the Spirit.

Paul said, in the second verse of the fifth chapter of First Corinthians, that the church at Corinth was all puffed up. Look at the verse, "And ye are puffed up, and have not rather mourned, that he that hath done this deed might be taken away from among you." They were boasting of how liberal they were in having a man in the church guilty of this gross sin of fornication or adultery. You see, they did not want to be accused of being narrow-minded; so, they boasted (and surely such boasting was in the flesh) that they permitted such a man to retain his membership with them. Does it not remind us of such boasting today?

Could you imagine one in the leadership of the Holy Spirit boasting that his or her church condoned immorality? But the Laodiceans believe that what pleases the people is right; they believe the voice of the people is the voice of God. Their own will is their authority, not the Word of God. They follow their own desires and defy those who would in any way cross them.

Neglect of Church Discipline Condones Immorality

As Paul wrote to the brethren at the church of Corinth, he reminded them that to neglect dealing with the case of immorality in their midst would affect the whole congregation. He put it this way, "Your glorying is not good. Know ye not that a little leaven leaveneth the whole lump? Purge out therefore the old leaven, that ye may be a new lump, as ye are unleavened. For even Christ our passover is sacrificed for us: Therefore let us keep the feast, not with old leaven, neither with the leaven of malice and wickedness; but with the unleavened bread of sincerity and truth" (1 Corinthians 5:6-8). Surely as members of the same local church of our Lord Jesus Christ, we are our brother's keeper. And not to do something to help our brother who has gone into gross sin that needs to be dealt with by the church makes us guilty before God.

To ignore sin that should be dealt with in our local congregations is to condone it. Today many people remain in good standing in their churches even though they are drunkards, harlots, murderers, adulterers, adulteresses, gamblers, dope addicts, etc. We know that there are

unsaved people who will always be critical of the churches, but they certainly have a right to be so, when churches so operate as to condone immorality.

Neglect of Church Discipline Eventually Omits the Gospel

Practically all churches who neglect the practice of church discipline do so because it displeases the people. It is so clear how the erroneous idea of the churches of Jesus Christ being democracies instead of theocracies leads to the doing of what human nature likes instead of what God commands.

The average church begins by saying that she is opposed to drinking, adultery, gambling, etc., but that she cannot, or will not, go so far as to take any action against it. You know, it is like being against a rattlesnake coming into your house, but certainly not being so drastic as to put it out should it come in anyway. This spirit of compromise grows like creeping paralysis. And before one realizes it, the churches speak out so weakly against any sin that it can barely be heard, and certainly they would never take action of any kind. They just sit trying to be pleasing to everybody uttering a few pious meaningless platitudes.

And, of course, when the churches get to this point, they cannot afford to preach the Gospel, telling people that they are hopelessly lost unless they get born again and washed in the blood of Christ. They are already so filled with unregenerate members that the voice of the people, which they suppose is the voice of God, would not allow such preaching or teaching. It would be all right to brag on buildings, offerings, membership, etc., but to preach on Hell, Sin, or Regeneration would be unthinkable. They need nothing, in their estimation, not even the Gospel!

Neglect of Church Discipline Leaves Churches No More Than Social Clubs

When a church is what Christ teaches her to be, she is as attractive as a very beautiful woman, but wrong doing is as out of place in her presence as immorality is with a real lady! But today because of rebellion against God's authority, holy living, and an uncompromising stand for right and against wrong, the average church is no more than a social club. In fact with the eating programs, athletic programs, and forms of amusement programs you would think that most of them are social clubs. If an Elijah, Moses, Amos, Paul, John the Baptist, or our Lord Jesus Christ should come to preach in the average church today, they would declare them fools and fanatics who were so crude that they should not be permitted

to speak in polite (?) society. You can join the average church today, and then, never attend, never give, and do everything to destroy that church's influence for 40 years and still be in good standing. The average social club is not that lenient. What a shame and a tragedy for a church of the Lord Jesus Christ to command less respect than a social club, all because of an effort to appease the sinful flesh.

Neglect of Church Discipline Causes a Loss of Spiritual Values

The church at Laodicea was thinking altogether in terms of the materialistic: money, buildings, crowds, popularity, etc. They had no place for the message of salvation and finding of God's Will for Christian lives. Today we see the same things. Some are more concerned to have a good report at the close of the year than to reach the lost, build up the saved, and walk with Him. Some are more concerned to build fine buildings than to send out missionaries, claiming that they will send out missionaries after they get well fixed at home. Do you suppose they ever realize that it may be too late then? Most of them forget about missionaries when they get their fine buildings. They feel like the people at Laodicea -- they are in need of nothing.

Oh, how temporal and materialistic churches can become. How easy it is for spiritual values to be lost in the debris of the desires of the flesh. How they find themselves trying to appeal to and please the material man who knows not Christ. Yet from this standpoint Christ was a perfect failure, and so will these churches be when they follow His steps.

Neglect of Church Discipline Makes Church Membership Mean Little if Anything

How many members of the average church could die and it would make no difference, as far as the work of our Lord is concerned? Can one honestly say that his or her church membership really means something, if the church would have to close her doors if all the members were like that individual? Church membership reports are the highest ever in our nation and so is crime. Does being a church member really mean something today, or is it a sort of badge of respectability or even a "cover-up?"

If churches respected the authority of Christ and His Word instead of rebelling against them, it would be a different matter. Church membership would then mean something. I had rather be a member of a church of Jesus Christ than any other organization on earth. But many prize membership in lodges, clubs, and societies above that of

membership in a church. They prove it by the small place they give the church in their lives. And this all goes back to our churches neglecting to do what our Lord Jesus taught them. What a price has been paid to please people! How foolish to believe that the voice of the people is the voice of God!

Conclusions

1. The churches as a whole are doomed because they are listening to and will continue to listen to the voice of people as though it were the voice of God. Jesus made it clear such would be the case.
2. New Testament churches are theocracies and not democracies.
3. Churches cannot please unregenerate men, if they follow their Christ.
4. Many preachers today find where their churches want them to go and follow along instead of finding out where Christ wants them to go and teaching and leading them in His way.
5. Most churches had rather be popular with men than popular with Christ.
6. The measure of greatness by most local churches today is money, members, and buildings, not devoted faithful servants of God.
7. The historical Christ and His message are just as unpopular today as when He lived here on earth some 1900 years ago.
8. The supreme need now is for saints who will follow Christ regardless!

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